

BETHANY'S FIRST DAY

You arrive in Indonesia- excited to take on the world and embark on a new adventure; you are also thrust into a new culture, jet-lagged, and alone in your house. How do you spend your first day? This is the scenario I found myself in last year (and in which you may soon find yourself): my counterpart was aware that “Americans are independent,” and thus left me alone in my house at 12:00 PM with no further plans until the following day. I had some options on how to spend my day; I needed to buy groceries, as I had no food, and I also wanted to clean my house, as it felt grimy and uncomfortable. I was already sweaty (thanks to my new home near the Equator), so I wanted to shower before leaving my home and going to the grocery store. Then I thought, “Well, if I shower and then clean, I will get dirty again, so I should clean first and then go to the store.” This was a great plan, until I started cleaning and realized that I didn’t have enough cleaning supplies, so I needed to go to the store. However, I didn’t know any Bahasa Indonesia, so I didn’t really know how to go to the store by myself. “So,” I thought, “maybe I should just clean with what I do have.” Unfortunately, it was about that time that I realized I was hungry. But, again, since I didn’t know any Bahasa Indonesia, I also didn’t know how to order any food. This language was becoming a problem. I was starting to feel panicky, and was actually doing circles around my house as my mind flipped from one decision to another. I began to feel like I needed to talk to someone to calm down. I didn’t want to be alone anymore, but I didn’t know anyone in town except for my counterpart, and I didn’t know if contacting her would be annoying to her (*note to everyone, it would not have been- but I didn’t know that then). It occurred to me that I still hadn’t let my family know I had arrived safely. All of a sudden, I felt a need to contact them...but I didn’t have internet. I had heard that KFC had free WiFi. I decided cleaning and showering could wait; I would brave the outside world, walk to KFC, talk to my family, and then go to the grocery store. Great! I had a plan.

I grabbed my computer and headed outside. I was called “Mister” no less than 5 times in my 3 minute walk. I made it to KFC. I sat down and opened up my laptop. Everyone in the entire restaurant stared at me. It took three tries to get the correct password from the KFC worker. By the time I got online, my computer was about to die, so I had to plug it in. The only outlet was at the top of a pillar next to me. This is how I ended up standing on a chair in the middle of KFC; which did not help mitigate all of the staring... Finally, finally, I got online. All I wanted was to talk to someone from home, but no one was online. No problem, I could call them quickly and ask them to go online. Problem, in my haste to leave my house, I left all of my phone numbers at home. Second problem, it was 3:00 AM at home. This is the true story of how I almost broke down in the middle of KFC on my first full day in Indonesia.

I want you to know a few things. There will be times you feel sad, overwhelmed, lonely, homesick, confused, or frustrated this year. As certain as I am of this, I am equally certain that it

will get better and you will have many moments of pure joy, excitement, gratitude, love, and contentment. By the next day, I woke up and felt newly optimistic and ready to tackle my new world. However, what I also want you to know is that transitioning into my new life and home would have been **UNEQUIVOCALLY** easier and less stressful if I had known at least basic Bahasa Indonesia. I wish I had done more preparing before I came. I know it is a crazy, frenzied time leading up to moving across the world, but in most sites in Indonesia, you will **NEED** to speak Bahasa Indonesia in order to accomplish anything, and you will feel so much better if you know some before you arrive. (No one wants to be the girl having a breakdown while standing on a chair in the middle of KFC...)